DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 185 317 CE 024 762

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TITLE Guidelines for the Selection of Continuing Education Advisory Committees.
INSTITUTION New York State Education Dept., Albany. Div. of Continuing Education.
NOTE 22p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Guides; Administrators; *Advisory Committees; Board of Education Role; Citizen Participation; Community Involvement; *Continuing Education; Group Membership; Guidelines; Individual Characteristics; Leadership; *Participant Characteristics; Program Administration; Program Development; Program Evaluation; *Public School Adult Education; Public Schools; Responsibility; School Community Relationship; *Selection

ABSTRACT

These guidelines for choosing candidates for advisory committee membership are intended for use by managers of large or small public school continuing education programs. Contents include (1) Background (of guidelines development), (2) Size of Committee and Terms of Members, (3) Compilation of Candidate List and Selection to Membership, (4) Recognition by Board of Education, (5) Community Representation and Member Characteristics, (6) Responsibilities of Members, (7) Program Development and Evaluation Roles, and (8) Management (of the committee). The guidelines represent practices or techniques used by directors of successful continuing education projects. (YLB)

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# GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEES

by

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MAY 1 1980

# GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEES

by W. William Freeman

## BACKGROUND

The New York State Education Department, through the Division of Continuing Education, is responsible for public school adult education throughout the State. In an effort to assist communities in program development, the Division of Continuing Education published a handbook to guide directors of public school continuing education. Contents provide an overview of the concept and process of adult education. Laws, rules and regulations of the NYS Commissioner of Education, program development, curriculum planning, the instructor and the adult learner, methods of instruction, guidance and counseling, and program operation are also included. Program managers are urged to become fully acquainted with the information therein, and to consult this manual as the first step toward solving problems in the realm of adult education.

Although not required by law or regulations, the superintendent of schools is urged, in this manual, to assume leadership responsibility by recommending members of a citizens' advisory committee for appointment by the board of education. Other obligations are stated and it is suggested that these responsibilities be carried out with

the assistance of the citizens' advisory committee. Furthermore, the tasks to be undertaken by the program manager are far too broad in scope and time requirements to permit success or even adequate attention from a director of continuing education. It is unusual for this individual to be a full-time continuing educator unless he/she operates a large-city program. Most directors are part-time or extra-time administrators in adult education.

These guidelines are designed to assist managers of large or small programs by relating practices or techniques used by directors of successful public school continuing education projects. Each successful program has an adult enrollment which is especially large in proportion to the size of the total population within the school district. The directors tend to be strongly in favor of ongoing advisory committees, and are sharing their success stories via these guidelines to help other program managers choose candidates for advisory committee membership.

## SIZE OF COMMITTEE AND TERMS OF MEMBERS

There is no best size for an advisory committee. However, it is especially important that all segments of the community be represented. The program manager should list all groups, agencies, and large employers within the school district prior to selecting candidates. This will help to assure that the potential candidates will represent

a balance of interests and influence demographically as well as geographically.

A map of the school district will be useful, especially if school neighborhoods are delineated. These areas should also depict socio-economic levels of the residents. Businesses and industries which employ large numbers of residents should be shown on the map, and the program manager should carefully note the level of skill or training represented by the work force at each of these establishments. These factors, considered together with the ethnic make-up of the school district, will provide vital information for those school officials or others who are charged with the responsibility of selecting advisory committee candidates.

The size of the advisory committee, then, will depend to a large extent upon the number of individuals needed to represent the community and its factions as fully as possible. However, one ought not fear that the group will become unwieldy if a large number of members is appointed or suggested for membership, even when widely diversified opinions or factions are represented. Differing views should be welcome at committee meetings because each individual present has an opportunity to vent the feelings and needs of his/her particular constituency at a place where all are equal, and everyone is presumed to be

interested in assisting to make the district's continuing education program an even greater servant of the community.

The program manager, responsible to select a number of candidates he/she believes necessary to create a balance in terms of demography and geography, is also the school official who initially determines the length of time during which a member will serve upon the advisory committee. The one year appointment is most popular, with re-appointments for subsequent years when the committee member and the responsible school officials agree that further service would benefit the continuing education program. However, it is not necessary to place a time limit upon the appointment.

Many advisory committees, at first, have appointees committed for staggered terms. One, two, and three year appointments are made because some program managers believe a one-third turn-over each year will forever bring new life and enthusiasm to the group. This tack is rarely retained, though, because candidates are usually carefully screened and tend to recognize when they, as members, ought not attempt further service upon the committee. Furthermore, gathering lists of good candidates requires time and a great deal of additional work, followed by extensive orientation and on-going training. Program directors have recognized that committees consisting of members who have

worked together for 2, 3, or more, years tend to become more efficient and enjoy the cooperative spirit created during those years. The friendships grow, and trust is deepened as members learn to depend upon one another and to respect and admire the talents of fellow volunteers to a cause in which they all have demonstrated a commitment. When the program manager determines the length of time during which individuals will serve on the advisory committee, he/she should do so in view of the unique characteristics of the community and with a careful eye toward the list of candidates for membership. It is important to remember that program development, enrichment, and expansion should be at the base of every decision when dealing with these crucial matters.

COMPILATION OF CANDIDATE LIST AND SELECTION TO MEMBERSHIP

A list of potential candidates for the advisory committee should be formulated with input from several officials of the public school district. The director of continuing education should seek names of candidates from the superintendent of schools, the coordinator of adult basic education, supervisors of adult vocational/occupational programs, and must not overlook suggestions by adult education program teachers. If an adult education advisory committee currently exists in this school district, it is often fruitful to ask the group to suggest names of

potential candidates. Occasionally, board of education members are willing and eager to identify individuals who possess qualities and talents needed by the committee. However, board of education members might best be surveyed for input by the chief school officer, upon request of the director of continuing education. It is also popular, in practice, for the program manager to present a report periodically to the board of education. During this progress report, the director of continuing education may announce that a list of candidates is being compiled, and suggested names would be most welcome from board members or others from the community.

Taken together, these names afford a talent bank from which new members of the advisory committee may be selected. The final choice, though, should remain with the school officials when new members are selected to serve. However, current participants on the advisory committee should be consulted for comments. This courtesy often helps to ease the transition of an individual from the candidate stage to full membership on the advisory committee. Furthermore, this procedure provides an introduction to the background of new appointees and tends to identify their training needs as committee members. Experienced members can thus determine their own roles in the staff development segment of their advisory committee responsibilities.

RECOGNITION BY BOARD OF EDUCATION

The board of education should be informed by the superintendent of schools that new candidates have been proposed for membership to the continuing education advisory committee. Names and backgrounds of the final candidates are then provided either by the superintendent or by the director of continuing education. The board of education may wish to discuss these individuals to assure that they offer those qualities sought for membership. At a subsequent board meeting, the superintendent will introduce the director of continuing education, who will be asked to deliver a progress report on his/her program. During this presentation, new candidates are introduced individually and their backgrounds are reviewed. Now, either the superintendent, the director of continuing education, or the chairman of the advisory committee may ask that the candidates be approved as members of the advisory group. The president of the board of education should welcome the new members and those who have been serving as members during the past year or years.

Perhaps, at this time, a board member will review the roles of advisory committee members, and explain the advisory nature of their group. It must be clear that the

board makes policy, but is eager to obtain advice from the continuing education advisory committee, which exists as an arm of the board of education. Furthermore, a television station camera crew and newspaper reporters should be notified in advance that these appointments are scheduled on the board of education's agendum. Subsequently, a television news clip and a newspaper article should announce the appointments, providing status to the new members and to the advisory group as a whole. This tack is especially helpful shortly before program brochures are sent to district residents. Simultaneously, advisory group members may be telephoning prospective students during a recruitment campaign immediately prior to program registration and enrollment. The advance publicity is most valuable.

## COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION AND MEMBER CHARACTERISTICS

Representations from the community is desirable, of course, and program managers should seek to have committee members from a wide spectrum of the school district. Talent from every ethnic, racial, and special-interest group or organization should be recognized and used for enhancement and expansion of the continuing education program. The enlistment of these human resources will produce a significant increase in the amount, and quality, of service to be provided directly to the entire population of the school district. Although

representation in direct proportion to the population or demographic make-up of the community is not necessary, many organizations, associations, agencies, and groups tend to be well-organized. They often acquire, via election or appointment, leaders who are especially vocal and who have a wide sphere of influence within their own agencies and throughout the geographic region. These leaders are recognized as "newsmakers" and are able to command the attention of the media. Furthermore, they are aware of the needs and desires of large numbers of continuing education's potential clientele within the school district. For one or more of the above reasons, they should be seriously considered for advisory committee membership. However, directors of continuing education must be forewarned that such leaders who serve best are those whose candidacies for committee membership are solicited directly. They will accept, generally, and display dedication. Conversely, those who are selected by their agencies or employers frequently fail to possess the enthusiasm and missionary zeal of true volunteers.

A demonstrated interest in education is the most important characteristic or quality to be sought in potential candidates for continuing education advisory committee membership. Candidates should be screened to assure the existence of enthusiasm for the types of tasks charged to the advisory committee. Additionally, a candidate's influence within the school district is a significant matter to be investigated by program officials. Political astuteness and leadership and position are of great value to the advisory committee. Candidates

who bring these attributes to the group tend to add status, which enhances the potential for accomplishing advisory committee objectives from a more secure and elevated base.

Candidates should possess public relations/public information skills because their tasks as committee members often require contact with individuals, groups, and the local newspaper, radio and television businesses or services. Persuasive appeals are standard operating procedures for advisory committee members. Therefore, it is necessary for program managers to explore the backgrounds of potential candidates to discover whether these skills have been acquired via education or experience.

If the advisory committee is comprised of individuals who represent the entire geographic spread of the school district, greater cooperation can be expected later from all neighborhoods. Also, all sections of the community will tend to retain a sense of belonging because each will have a direct line of communication to the committee and to the school board. Input can be obtained from all corners of the district, and unique needs can then be addressed by the advisory group and by the director of continuing education. Finally, representation from all areas of the community will help to bring together those divergent viewpoints which exist within the school district. This will ultimately strengthen the advisory committee because opposing factions are able to seek solutions and agree to pursue them cooperatively for the benefit of the entire community.

Potential candidates should be solicited for definite time commitments to perform the tasks assigned to the advisory group. Mere attendance at regularly scheduled meetings may not be sufficient, but the director of continuing education should determine, with input from the administrative and instructional continuing education staff, the amount of time deemed minimally acceptable for adequate participation.

When circumstances warrant this tack, major employers in the area might be encouraged to provide candidates for the continuing education advisory committee. These recommendations normally indicate that the appointees are assigned to perform committee tasks with the employers' approval to commit as much time as the chores or responsibilities require. Furthermore, it is assumed that the employers and most employees represented by these candidates will receive a significant amount of feedback from the committee's work, and input will be solicited on an on-going basis. This articulation from employers and employees at nearby businesses, industries, and other agencies should be hailed as an opportunity to develop and maintain cooperative relationships for the community-at-large.

Program managers should work carefully, also, to assure that their advisory groups are to some extent balanced ethnically and racially. It is also important to pay heed to available talents and the leadership skills of women who reside and work within the school district. Traditionally, though, these balances have been achieved

incidentally when the characteristics or talents mentioned above are highlighted in the selection process.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS

It is customary for the entire advisory committee to undertake most tasks while serving as a committee-of-the whole. Subcommittees should be formed, though, as needs arise. Program directors often find that these smaller groupings are most useful as on-going subcommittees, which assume the kinds of never-ending duties requiring frequent attention and some specialized knowledge or training. Although each subcommittee will consist of one or more members of the advisory committee, other individuals from the school district may be asked to serve as subcommittee members when recognized talents or skills are needed to perform the work of this small arm of the continuing education advisory committee. These subcommittees might begin as ad hoc groups, but can mature in sophistication and exemplary performance to warrant long-term or on-going status.

Most continuing education programs have similar goals and defined problems. Therefore, major responsibilities of committee members tend to be uniform, to a large extent, throughout the school districts of New York State. Program directors of all districts -- large, small, urban, rural -- are urged to seek committments from advisory committee

members in the realms of needs assessment, planning, program development and review, and recruitment of students.

Members should be instrumental in organizing and facilitating an annual needs assessment. A great deal of person-to-person interview time is required for this major responsibility, but the carefully prepared questions must be compiled with the assistance of professional staff members or experts from the community. Responses should be sought from individuals representing all facets and factions within the school district. These replies, indicating the desires and needs of local citizens, must be analyzed to determine program offerings for the approaching continuing education season. In fact, much of the program planning will ensue from these findings.

Suggestions for continuing education class or program offerings should be sought from committee and subcommittee members. Remember that these individuals were selected because they are usually attuned to the moods, attitudes, needs, and desires of their many friends and neighbors. They blend well into the continuing education schema as the eyes and ears of the comprehensive program. Their up-to-date knowledge renders them extremely valuable, also, for periodic reviews of proposed plans and revisions suggested by the director of continuing education.

As recognized leaders in their neighborhoods, ethnic organizations, places of employment, and community action programs, members should serve as avenues of information. They can distribute program bulletins and advertisements to all groups and to other individuals who hold leadership roles in the school district's many agencies -- public and private. Furthermore, several members of the advisory committee and/or subcommittees may welcome the opportunity to create and produce brochures, newspaper advertisements and feature articles, and spot-announcements for radio and television. This aspect of the public relations/information responsibility can be chaired or managed by a committee participant who was selected to the advisory group specifically for his/her work in the media.

Periodically, the advisory committee should appear before the board of education to deliver a progress report and to make recommendations for program enrichment and/or expansion. Each request should be supported by evidence attesting to the continuing education desires and needs of the community. It is urged that these presentations to the board of education or to any other agency or organization be carefully planned and perhaps rehearsed to assure that all pertinent matters are clearly aired and logically stated. Questions should be anticipated, and answers should be available at once, if possible. Therefore, planning must

include the formulation of questions and a discussion of those responses needed to clarify all matters in layman's terms.

The public relations/information responsibiiity encompasses the task of providing interesting and informative speeches, discussions, or slide presentations to service clubs, schools, religious bodies, taxpayer groups, senior citizen centers, social organizations, and to any other gathering which may exist within the school district. Again, careful preparation and rehearsal are key ingredients. It is wise for the program manager to solicit those members or other volunteers whose skills have been sharpened via past experience. Media personnel selected to serve as committee members tend, usually, to have a following - fans - in the area. Their commitment and performance will help to enhance, enrich, and expand the comprehensive continuing education program.

Most advisory committees plan and mount recruitment campaigns prior to student registration. Thereupon, no further attention is needed until the following term or semester. However, where adult basic education and/or high school equivalency classes operate, the recruitment responsibility must be continuous. These literacy programs are required to offer individualized instruction in New York State, and students progress at their respective rates. As a result, they may enter at any time and then leave upon attaining an objective. When one adult literacy

student progresses from adult basic education to high school equivalency class, one student slot becomes available. It should be filled at once. Upon the attainment of success by passing the GED examination, high school equivalency students leave vacancies which also should be filled immediately. Traditionally, a subcommittee retains this responsibility, but draws upon the entire advisory committee for advice and assistance on a regular basis.

Every member of the advisory committee should be sufficiently attuned to his/her neighborhood, place of employment, and nearby community agencies and organizations to recognize individuals who need literacy education. These potential students are often unemployed, underemployed, uneducated, or undereducated. They lack credentials in a credentialed society and they need social living skills to help them function as adults. Personal contact is usually necessary to encourage these potential students to enroll. Advisory committee members who are acquainted in those neighborhoods where literacy is desperately needed can bring to bear the greatest possible uplift in the lives of target population people. The recruitment and further encouragement of these individuals may be considered the noblest deed of an advisory committee member.

## PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION ROLES

Universally, the advisory committee plays a role in program development. Candidates for selection to the advisory group should possess sufficient background in the activities of the community to indicate a high level of familiarity with the pulse of the people. A willingness to assist in the annual needs assessment is further evidence that the potential member will participate in program development. Information gleaned from this annual survey will prove most valuable in helping to devise and revise the continuing education program toward the comprehensive school-based activity designed to meet the needs of the local population.

Armed with the results of the needs assessment and other information obtained from the citizenry, the advisory committee should meet with the program manager to review the current program. Other staff members should be available to provide details to assure that all facts are presented and taken into consideration for the planning phase. Planning, of course, is done by the entire advisory group. Suggestions should be solicited from all members and then presented to the program manager, who will subsequently create a tentative comprehensive continuing education program. Finally, it is reviewed by the board of education for approval or revision.

Evaluation of the continuing education program must be carefully planned with the aid of advisory committee members. It must be determined, in advance, how to judge whether objectives have been met. Formative and summative evaluation plans should be prepared to permit changes during the current program year and to design an improved continuing education project for the following year. Perhaps a subcommittee could assume this assignment and enlist the expertise of talent found in the community. Again, administrative and instructional staff members should be available to provide input and to assist in the planning and execution of the evaluation. However, when sensitive elements of the evaluation plan are to be carried out, program managers might well consider the necessity of reserving these duties for the school district hierarchy.

MANAGEMENT

Every continuing education advisory committee should be chaired by a member of the group. The election or appointment of a vice-chairman or vice-chairwoman is also recommended. Subcommittees, under most circumstances, are also chaired by members of the advisory committee. However, it is advisable to retain the program manager to serve as coordinator, manager, or executive director of the advisory committee. The director of continuing education, frequently termed program manager, traditionally is assigned this responsibility via his/her job description when it is initially prepared by the superintendent of schools.

In New York State, the program manager sometimes maintains additional titles, such as occupational director, assistant superintendent, or coordinator of adult basic education. However, while this individual is leading or responding to the continuing education advisory committee, he/she dons the mantle of the director of continuing education and serves, at that time, exclusively in the realm of continuing education.